



# PUBLIC-ELITE GAP ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN DISCOURSES ABOUT EU ENLARGEMENT AMONG CITIZENS AND ELITES IN SERBIA

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Elitsa Kortenska, Indraneel Sircar and Bernard Steunenber

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# **PUBLIC-ELITE GAP ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN DISCOURSES ABOUT EU ENLARGEMENT AMONG CITIZENS AND ELITES IN SERBIA**

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## **Abstract**

Enlargement is often regarded as an elite-driven process, which does not or not sufficiently include the views of ordinary citizens. At the same time, support for integration has been eroding over the last decade, contributing to a public-elite gap in preferences towards the process. This paper investigates the relationship between elite and citizens discourses by focusing on Serbia as one of the candidate countries. The case of a candidate country is interesting, as domestic elites need to obtain the support from citizens in making the EU-driven transformations, whereas citizens may be critical to some of the imposed reforms. This may push and pull both groups in the opposite directions, increasing the public-elite gap on European integration. This contribution supplements previous research, which identified discourses among citizens in Serbia, with an analysis of media content. Using vignettes for each discourse found among citizens, the contents of statements in two major Serbian newspapers have been coded. The analysis shows that all four citizen discourses are represented in media. The discourse favoring Serbia's accession enjoys best representation in the media, reflecting views of Serbia's political elite. In contrast, the narrative rejecting Serbia's integration in the EU finds the least space in newspapers, while the remaining two discourses share almost an equal media representation. Most importantly, we find that approximately one fourth of media content does not fit any of the four citizen discourses. This demonstrates not only the size, but also the substance of the public-elite gap on European integration in Serbia. The public-elite gap illustrated here tilts the political debate in Serbia towards one with rather supportive expectations of enlargement and integration. At the same time, we noted that more critical views among citizens are not, or not yet, reflected in the media, while the media is reporting on issues that do not resonate with citizens' views. A question is whether this is a sustainable route, and whether political 'entrepreneurs' will capitalize on these views in order to build alternative political platforms in Serbian politics or influence Serbia's progress.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The EU enlargement process is often portrayed as being defined predominantly by the features of the accession negotiations: an arduous and institutionalized bargaining process between political elites in candidate countries and the Union's member states to hammer out the details of fulfilling the *acquis communautaire* (or receiving bespoke opt-outs) (Avery/Cameron 1998). The enlargement to post-socialist countries in Europe gave rise to a different form of 'Europeanization East' (Grabbe 2003; Héritier 2005) designed to integrate or reintegrate countries into the Union, in contrast to Europeanization connoting convergence amongst existing members. This Eastern variant of Europeanization is seen as a top-down elite-driven process, whereby candidate countries governments are either driven by a rational cost-benefit calculation of undertaking reforms, or are gradually socialized into a 'European' way of doing things (Schimmelfennig/Sedelmeier 2005).

The technical and elite-led conceptualization of Eastern enlargement omits the significant influence of the *discursive* space in the Europeanization process, which was critical for the accession of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. This becomes even more significant in the process of enlargement to candidates in former Yugoslavia and other parts of the Balkans in two ways. First, the very notion of the 'Balkans' has provided a civilizational demarcation that differentiates these 'others' from 'Europeans' (Todorova 1997). The construct of the Balkans has rebounded back to the region to affect local self-understandings of a distinct 'us' that is fundamentally different from 'them' in Europe. Second, the notion of Europe is also ambiguous and simultaneously has both strong positive and negative connotations. Boris Buden, a Croatian cultural commentator, posits that in former Yugoslavia, the notion of Europe represents "the most sublime values of justice, liberty and equality, but at the same time the place where these values are perverted, so that those in the region are more European than Europe itself, but also more anti-European" (Buden 1996: 139).

Our analysis below brings the discursive field back into the analysis of EU enlargement using Serbia as an illustrative case study among the Western Balkan (potential) candidates. Although there is a number of possible definitions, we define a discourse as "shared means of making sense of the world, embedded in language [...] [and] grounded in the assumptions, judgments, contentions, dispositions and capabilities of citizens, enabling them to construct shared or common narratives" (Dryzek 2000: 18).<sup>2</sup> Political discourses can be expressed by individuals either as rational or visceral/emotional manifestations (Dimitrova et al. 2015: 6). Indeed, cross-country studies on Euroscepticism have shown that individuals' preferences are based on their perceived trust in EU and domestic institutions, utilitarian estimations of personal benefits as well as feelings about effects on national cultural identity (McLaren 2007). In other words, individual attitudes towards the EU cannot be reduced to a simple cost-benefit analysis, while citizens' feelings about threats to their national cultural identity must also be taken into account (McLaren 2002).

To understand why public support for European integration is eroding, we need to have insight into the underlying 'judgments, contentions and dispositions' of citizens, which are typical ingredients of discourses.

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1 The authors would like to thank Antoaneta Dimitrova (Leiden University) and Adam Fagan (Queen Mary University of London) for their feedback and comments on the paper.

2 For a similar use of the concept of discourse, see Dryzek/Berejikian 1993; Dryzek/Braithwaite 2000; Dryzek/Holmes 2002; and Dryzek/Niemeyer 2008.

As Hooghe and Marks (2005) argue, the times of ‘permissive consensus’ among European publics, which allowed European integration to proceed by stealth, are over. People, for whatever reasons, have an opinion about the EU. We live in times of ‘constraining dissensus’, in which the public, more than in previous times, oppose decision-making to the EU level because of concerns related to identity and values (Eichenberg/Dalton 2007; Herranz-Surrallés 2012; Hooghe/Marks 2005, 2009; Hughes et al. 2004; Startin/Krouwel 2013). Both identities and values are closely related to our concept of discourses. Interestingly, discourses, including the one’s explored below on EU enlargement, are neither temporally fixed, nor are they rootless and easy to change (Risse 2010). On the one hand, discourses are embedded in historical legacies and systems of values, which provide stability (Dryzek/Holmes 2002). In another study we show that over the past years Dutch discourses on European integration remain rather stable (Steunenberget al. 2015). On the other hand, there is a certain measure of flexibility in how these deeper meanings are shaped and reshaped by political elites and the media (Dimitrova et al. 2015). A number of studies on EU enlargement have shown how media and elite discourses can ‘frame’ or ‘prime’ public attitudes (Dursun-Ozkanca 2011; Lecheler/de Vreese 2010; Maier/Rittberger 2008; Maier et al. 2012).

Our analysis aims at identifying the links between citizens’ discourses on the one hand, and media and elite discourses on the other, to show whether and to what extent these discourses are related. In this paper, we build on earlier research by Dimitrova and Kortenska (2015) and Dimitrova et al. (2015), who identified several citizens’ discourses in Serbia through a bottom-up approach using Q methodology. We expand these findings with an analysis of media statements on EU enlargement and Serbian candidacy, focusing on the similarities and differences between citizens and media/elite discourses.

Some public opinion studies have revealed a gap between public opinion on the topic of European integration and the positions and actions of governing elites and policy-makers on both national and European levels of rhetorical action and decision-making (Eichenberg/Dalton 2007; Herranz-Surrallés 2012). This gap in opinions may be reflected into rather different discourses between citizens and elites, as, for example, suggested by Schmidt (2006). Within the context of the EU, she distinguishes between more policy-oriented, coordinative discourse, which elites use in order to negotiate over EU policy, and communicative discourses to inform national constituencies. Elite discourses neither represent pure command-and-control of an obedient public, nor do they perfectly mirror citizens’ understandings of EU accession on the ground. It is this gap between elite cues and citizens’ narratives that can produce political instability and protest, and derail the process of integration (Dryzek/Holmes 2002: 6).

A number of studies also has pointed out that the political debate on European integration is changing. There is an increasing use of anti-EU and anti-immigration rhetoric, not only taken on by extreme political parties, but also mainstream ones (Brack/Startin 2015; Hurrelmann et al. 2013). The mainstreaming of Euroskeptic and rejectionist discourses across Europe has also led to a politicization of European issues in the domestic political arena as a discursive phenomenon (Hurrelmann et al. 2013; Schmidt 2006). This development, in which a rather critical and even rejectionist position on European integration is taken, may also occur in countries that are associated with the EU. Our analysis of discourses in Serbia, including elite and citizens’ discourses, may shed some further light on this.

In this paper, we use citizens' discourses identified in Serbia in earlier research as the point of departure for our analysis. By deriving indicators from these discourses, we are able to classify media statements, which we gathered, as part of one of these discourses or not. In this way, we are able to indicate what proportion of the newspaper coverage links to specific citizens' discourses. In addition, we are also able to indicate what remains outside of the scope of citizens' understandings but finds expression within the domestic media/elite discourse. This mechanism allows us not only to quantify and measure the existing gap between citizens and elites on the topic of EU integration, but also to show on which issues a mismatch may exist.

We find that the discourse favoring Serbia's accession is the one with the highest level of representation in the media. In contrast, the only discourse among citizens opposing enlargement and rejecting Serbia's integration in the EU finds the least space in the selected newspapers. The other two discourses share almost an equal representation in the media statements we have collected. Furthermore, we find that approximately one fourth of the media content does not fit in any of the four discourses, illustrating the size and content of the public-elite gap on European integration in Serbia. Finally, connecting our findings with survey results on public opinion, we note that the findings from the discursive analyses present a much more nuanced (and from a citizens' perspective, more optimistic) picture than one based on survey data.

Our paper is organized as follows: we start with a brief background discussion of the relations between Serbia and the EU from the end of the Milošević regime (2000) to the opening of EU accession negotiations (2014) to illustrate the current state of affairs in Serbia. In Section 3, we discuss existing public opinion research, including the earlier analysis of citizens' discourses in Serbia. In Section 4, we present our empirical analysis, which is based on media statements from *Politika* and *Danas*, two Belgrade-based newspapers with a national readership. By operationalizing the citizens' discourses found in earlier work, we are able to link the statements from Serbian politicians and other opinion-makers, examine the resonance and dissonance between citizen and elite discourses on EU enlargement in Serbia, and provide our conclusions in the final section (Section 5).

## **2. Serbia and the EU: overview of the context of enlargement**

Before delving into the discursive field of European integration in Serbia, an overview of the historical background of Serbia-EU relations allows us to put the discourses among the elites and the citizens in the broader domestic context and experiences with EU enlargement. The EU, its institutions, policies, and borders have significantly changed in the same period, and today's enlargement context is quite different from the context of CEE post-communist accession, both internally in the EU and externally in candidate countries and new neighboring countries. While CEE countries' trajectories are marked by the legacy of a communist past, the Western Balkans candidates are still deeply affected by the legacies of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia.

A supranational European presence in Serbia was established soon after Slobodan Milošević was ousted in October 2000. The European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) opened an office in Kosovo in February



2000 after the conflict there, and commenced operations at the Belgrade office in December 2000. EAR was involved in the rebuilding of critical infrastructure, but soon became involved in the reconstruction of almost every sector in Serbia (Fagan 2010). EAR ceased its operations in 2008. However, the EU continued to provide extensive technical and financial support through a number of programs, including CARDS, EIDHR, and since 2007, IPA.<sup>3</sup>

Alongside technical and financial assistance, the EU has also pushed democratic reforms through conditionality linked with different types of rewards on the way towards European integration. The EU unveiled its regional Stabilization and Association process (SAP) for the ‘Western Balkans’ (former Yugoslavia countries minus Slovenia plus Albania) in November 2000, after the fall of the Milošević-led regime.<sup>4</sup> The SAP would push countries in the Western Balkans to undertake reforms in line with the Copenhagen Criteria, but also highlighted the need for cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY), regional cooperation, and refugee return. The SAP incentivized democratic transformation through individualized Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs), which laid out further reforms in return for closer links with the EU. After the 2003 European Council meeting in Thessaloniki, SAP was upgraded and aimed to prepare Western Balkan countries “for future integration into European structures and ultimate membership into the Union [emphasis added]” (GAERC 2003: 11). This remains the major institutional framework defining the process of EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans for which the Copenhagen Criteria and the SAP remain the primary drivers.

Although not directly a part of the accession process, EU visa liberalization is an example of EU conditionality that triggered rapid reforms in the Western Balkans and Serbia. In January 2008, the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) encouraged the Commission to develop individualized Roadmaps with relevant benchmarks for Western Balkan countries in exchange for visa liberalization. The Commission did this through structured dialogues with four Western Balkan countries: Serbia, Montenegro, Former Yugoslav Republic (FYR) of Macedonia, and Albania (EC 2008). The European Commission presented Serbia in its Roadmap in May 2008. The requirements included the implementation of the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements. The Roadmap also covered four other areas: document security; illegal migration; public order and security; and external relations issues related to the movement of individuals.<sup>5</sup> The Commission deemed that FYR Macedonia had achieved the benchmarks in the Roadmap by May 2009, and both Serbia and Montenegro had done so by November 2009. As a result, the three Western Balkan countries were put on the ‘White Schengen’ list from December 2009. This allowed citizens from these countries who held biometric passports to visit countries in the Schengen Zone for up to three months without a visa (B92 et al. 2009). The Commission monitors continued implementation of the benchmarks and publishes an annual Post-Visa Liberalization Monitoring report.

3 The acronyms in full are: CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization); EIDHR (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights); and IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance).

4 An online copy of the Zagreb Declaration that summarizes SAP can be found here: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/declang4.doc.html](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/declang4.doc.html); accessed 9 August 2016.

5 A full version of the Roadmap can be found on the European Stability Initiative website here: <http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/White%20List%20Project%20Paper%20-%20Roadmap%20Serbia.pdf>; accessed 9 August 2016.

As part of the aforementioned Thessaloniki agenda, the EU proposed to draft European Partnership documents that would identify sectors and issues which required support to facilitate closer integration with the EU (GAERC 2003: 14). The 2004 European Partnership for Serbia and Montenegro (including Kosovo under UNSC Resolution 1244) prioritized a number of key political and economic reforms, as well as adhering to EU standards related to the internal market and sectoral policies (Council of the EU 2004). The updated 2006 Partnership document repeated the same priority areas, including more emphasis on cooperation with ICTY and constructive dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina (Council of the EU 2006). The Partnership was updated in 2008 to reflect the separation of Serbia and Montenegro and the adoption of the IPA program as the main instrument for EU assistance (replacing CARDS) (Council of the EU 2008).

The Commission provided a favorable conclusion on the feasibility of Serbia and Montenegro to start SAA negotiations in 2005, but talks were suspended in May 2006 due to a lack of cooperation with ICTY to apprehend high-profile suspects. After the formation of a ruling coalition in the 2007 Serbian general election, the Council concluded that the incoming government would take concrete steps to fully comply with Copenhagen plus criteria, and so the SAA negotiations recommenced in June of that year (Council of the EU 2007). The text of the EU-Serbia SAA was agreed on in September 2007, but another negative opinion on cooperation with the ICTY delayed the initialing of the agreement until November 2007.

The subsequent Serbian parliamentary elections in May 2008 were particularly divisive, since they were held three months after the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo, and represented a poll on differing viewpoints on Serbia's European path. On the one hand, nationalist and right-wing parties equated further European integration to a loss of Serbian territorial integrity. On the other hand, the outgoing government led by the Democratic Party stressed the need to continue with EU integration, and signed the SAA in April 2008. Unsurprisingly, this was met with strong opposition from right-wing and nationalist opponents. A spokesperson for the conservative Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) said that: "[Deputy Prime Minister] Djelić's... dirty signature was on [EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier] Solana's agreement for Kosovo independence... [T]he main responsibility lies at the door of [President] Boris Tadic, who gave Judas's seal to this betrayal" (Tanjug 2008). The pro-European DS-led coalition won more seats than any other list, and formed a government with the support of a SPS-led coalition.

Although the SAA was initialed and a pro-European coalition won the 2008 election, the Netherlands blocked the ratification of the agreement on the grounds that high-profile suspects had not been apprehended and transferred to the ICTY. Even with the capture of Radovan Karadžić in July 2008 and positive opinion from ICTY Chief Prosecutor Serge Brammertz, the Netherlands continued to block the ratification of the EU-Serbia SAA and the accompanying Interim Trade Agreement, because two other high-profile suspects, Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić, had still not been arrested (BBC 2008). The Netherlands 'unfroze' the Interim Trade Agreement in December 2009 after being convinced that the Serbian government had taken steps to cooperate with ICTY. The Dutch veto delayed the SAA process for two years, until Brammertz gave another positive opinion in 2010 on Serbian cooperation with the ICTY, and the Netherlands and the United Kingdom removed their opposition (Lungescu 2010). The EU-Serbia SAA was finally concluded in 2013.

The SAA ratification process occurred during Serbia's pursuit to become an EU candidate country. The Serbian government first delivered an application for the EU candidate status in December 2009, even though it had not yet completed the previous step of ratification of the SAA by EU member states. The Council of the EU did not refer the application to the European Commission at the first opportunity, in June 2010, preferring to defer the matter until September 2010, and focused on SAA implementation instead (Tanjug 2010). The Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany were reportedly against sending the application to the Commission. In particular, the Netherlands still retained reservations about the level of Serbian cooperation with the ICTY (Večernje novosti 2010).

With a proviso on Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY, the Council for Foreign Ministers of EU Member States forwarded Serbia's application for the EU candidate status to the European Commission in October 2010. DG Enlargement sent the questionnaire to Serbia, which would determine the Commission's opinion on EU candidate status in November 2010.<sup>6</sup> During this period, Brammertz repeatedly stated that the only way for Serbia to demonstrate full cooperation with the ICTY was by arresting Mladić and Hadžić, both of whom were believed by international authorities to still be hiding in Serbia. These suspicions were eventually confirmed. Mladić had lived under an assumed name in the Banat region of northern Serbia, and was arrested by Serbian Special Forces in May 2011 (BBC 2011a). Hadžić was arrested in the Fruška Gora region two months later (BBC 2011b). Both men were subsequently transferred to the ICTY. Soon after this, in October 2011, the Commission recommended that Serbia be given the status of EU Candidate Country in October 2011 (which came into force in March 2012). At the same time, the upgraded Commission Strategy made the start of EU negotiations and progress in them contingent upon normalization of relations between the governments in Belgrade and Pristina as the country's specific Copenhagen Plus criteria for European integration. This is an issue that we find ambiguously and imprecisely reflected in the public space in Serbia, based on both citizens' and media discourses.

After several rounds of negotiations mediated by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, officials from Pristina and Belgrade initialed a landmark deal in April 2013 as a significant step in normalizing relations, known as the Brussels Agreement (Tanjug 2013a). The Serbian government approved the deal in a closed session three days later (Tanjug 2013b), clearing the last impediment for the start of accession talks. Although accession talks could have started in mid-2013, Germany reportedly pushed to delay the start of negotiations until after the German Federal elections in September 2013 (EurActiv 2013). The European Commission agreed to start accession negotiations with Serbia in January 2014, and the first two chapters were opened in December 2014: Chapter 32 (financial control) and Chapter 35 (normalization of relations with Kosovo) (Council of the EU 2015). The two chapters related to the rule of law, Chapters 23 and 24, central to the EU's 'new approach' to enlargement, will probably be opened in the first half of 2016, though they will be the hardest to close due to the requirement to show a solid track record of implementation (Dragojlo 2016). However, Croatia blocked the opening of these chapters, citing three issues: protection of Croats in Serbia; jurisdiction of the Serbian war crimes court over other parts of former Yugoslavia; and Serbian cooperation with ICTY (Anastajevic 2016). Chapters 23 and 24 were finally opened in July 2016 (Ristic 2016).

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6 For Serbia's replies to the questionnaire, see: [http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/upitnik/srb\\_questionnaire\\_engl.pdf](http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/upitnik/srb_questionnaire_engl.pdf), accessed 9 August 2016.

Table 1: Serbian EU integration and extra conditionality

	Year	Extra conditionality
Favorable Commission opinion to start SAA negotiations (includes Montenegro)	2005	Talks between Serbia and the EU suspended due to lack of cooperation with ICTY to apprehend high-profile war crimes suspects.
EU-Serbia SAA initialed	2007	Initialing the SAA was delayed by two months due to a negative option on Serbian cooperation with ICTY.
EU and Serbia signed the SAA and Interim Trade Agreement (ITA)	2008	The Netherlands blocked ratification of the SAA and associated ITA citing non-cooperation with ICTY, though Karadžić was arrested in Serbia in July 2008.
ITA block lifted	2009	The Netherlands lifts its block of the ITA, but the SAA remained frozen.
Serbia applies for EU candidate status	2009	The Council of the EU did not send the application to the Commission at the first opportunity (in June 2010), with the Netherlands expressing reservations about Serbia's cooperation with ICTY.
SAA block lifted	2010	The Netherlands and the UK lift their block of the SAA after the ICTY Chief Prosecutor gave a series of positive opinions on Serbian cooperation with ICTY; the SAA was finally ratified in 2013.
Serbia becomes EU candidate	2011	Ratko Mladić arrested in May 2011 and Goran Hadžić apprehended in July 2011; the Commission said that the opening of accession negotiations would still depend on the normalization of relations with Pristina.
Serbia opens EU accession negotiations	2014	Pristina and Belgrade conclude the Brussels Agreement, mediated by the EU in April 2013, though opening accession negotiations are delayed (reportedly) to not interfere with German Federal elections in September 2013.

Source: Authors.

Serbia's progress in EU integration has primarily hinged on two key issues: (1) full cooperation with the ICTY; and (2) normalization of relations with Kosovo, commonly referred to the Copenhagen Plus criteria. The EU has pursued this strategy instead of focusing on substantive democratic and economic reforms in Serbia (Ostojić/Fagan 2014), which creates a danger of trading off regional security issues for democratic reform in Serbia and elsewhere in the Western Balkans (Kmezić 2015). The steps in Serbia's grueling EU integration journey, and the sanctions applied as part of extra conditionality, are summarized in Table 1.

The EU's prioritization of regional security is also embodied in the continued high-level political dialogue to facilitate regional cooperation and reconciliation in Kosovo-Serbia relations (Dimitrova/Kortenska 2016; EC 2015a). The EU's role in regional stability and peaceful neighborly relations is reemphasized as part of the new enlargement strategy. However, this purported stabilizing role is confounded by a number of exogenous factors affecting Serbia, including: the geo-strategic rivalry between the EU and Russia in Eastern Europe (MAXCAP Policy Task Force 2015); the recent influx of refugees and other non-European migrants to the Western Balkans as the buffer before they reach the EU; and the devastating floods in 2014 that damaged public trust in domestic institutions. Moreover, the rapprochement between the EU and Turkey on refugees and combatting international terrorism despite democratic back sliding by candidates such as Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has damaged the transformative credibility of the Union (Müftüler-Baç 2016). These issues illustrate the sufficiently different internal and external context in which Serbia's road of European integration proceeds in contrast to CEE candidates in the 2004 and 2007 enlargement rounds.

Against the backdrop of the long and difficult history of EU-Serbia relations, we now focus on how this context of European integration and the progress of Serbia along the enlargement ladder are reflected: (a) in public opinion survey results; and (b) in two levels of discursive arenas within the country. We elaborate on the trends in public opinion and the contextual factors that previous studies have systematically found to influence public attitudes, such as the role of domestic media environment and political elites' discourses in shaping public support for and/or opposition to European integration.

### **3. Political elites, media and public opinion on European integration**

The significance of support towards EU enlargement in the process and a future successful outcome for candidates in the Western Balkans has already been established by a number of scholars on European integration. The need for favorable public support has already been recognized during the accession process of CEE candidates in combination with support within EU member states. The latter is crucially important, not only for the national ratification of the accession of a new member state, but also for the progress of the negotiations during the accession process (Dimitrova/Kortenska 2016; Steunenberg 2002). Thus, when investigating individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards the EU, it is important to first look at general public opinion survey trends. The next section focuses on these trends in Serbia, particularly over the last decade. The overview is followed by a brief discussion on the role of media and political elite rhetoric in shaping the public moods in different national contexts. We then turn to a detailed description of the data collection methods and the analyses adopted for this paper.

#### **3.1 *Public opinion in Serbia***

Public attitudes towards accession, against the background of elite discourses, mirror the arduous stop-start trajectory of Serbia's interaction with the EU. The public opinion data suggest a complex calculus in which Serbian citizens have tried to balance the increased opportunities due to mobility (especially for

youth) against extra conditionality related to arresting suspected war criminals and normalizing bilateral relations with Kosovo. These are quite country-specific factors, which go beyond the individual's utilitarian or cultural motives.

Serbian support for accession to the EU is gradually waning according to survey data. The Gallup Balkan Monitor, conducted across the Western Balkans, found that 61 percent of respondents in 2006 felt that the EU accession would be a 'good thing', whilst the figure had dropped to 36 percent by 2011 (Toshkov et al. 2014: 19). This trend is consistent with more recent Eurobarometer data, where only 35 percent of Serbians felt that membership would be a 'good thing' in 2012 (EC 2012: T30), though this has rebounded slightly to 38 percent by autumn 2015 (EC 2015b: T42).

This gradual decrease in public support for EU accession is also reflected in the regular surveys, commissioned by the International Republican Institute (IRI). The surveys asked how respondents would vote if membership were determined by a referendum. The percentage of those stating to vote in support of Serbian accession has fallen from 64 percent (in April 2011) to 44 percent (in November 2015) (IRI/Ipsos 2015). These numbers broadly concur with the periodic public opinion data collected by the Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), which found that 63 percent of Serbians supported accession in a hypothetical referendum (in April 2011) and only 48 percent would do the same four years later (in December 2015) (SEIO 2015). The SEIO data also shows that this general trend of declining support is not monotonic. There are short-term spikes in support for EU accession when critical conditionality hurdles are cleared, such as the signing of the SAA (in 2008), the implementation of visa liberalization (in early 2010), and the opening of accession negotiations (in 2014) (see Table 1). The latter in particular is the time in which we collected the statements in media – January and February 2014, while the citizen discourse data was collected throughout 2014, shortly after the start of accession negotiations.

The SEIO results imply that Serbian citizens are persuaded more by optimistic utilitarian calculations of the benefits of accession rather than by more negative value-based understandings. Respondents in the December 2015 poll said that the EU provides an opportunity to improve conditions in Serbia (18 percent), more employment opportunities (16 percent), a better future for young people (15 percent), and freedom to travel in the EU (12 percent), with fewer people making negative associations with the EU, such as a loss of cultural identity (11 percent) or the Union being an unrealistic 'utopia' (eight percent). Interestingly, the relatively positive sentiment towards the EU in the SEIO survey is at odds with the findings of the IRI poll in November 2015. Negative connotations with the EU being costly (51 percent) or leading to a loss of sovereignty (41 percent) were more popular associations with the EU than providing more jobs (37 percent) or a better life (35 percent). These benefits only scored slightly better than associating the EU with the promotion of the 'wrong values' (34 percent). These diverging results may be explained by some of the methodological shortcomings of survey research design, on which we will not focus here, but which highlight the motivation for seeking out an innovative, bottom-up reconstructive approach in the study of discourses. Our results bring clarity to the complex ways in which public attitudes regarding European integration are formed.

The drawbacks of the EU were expressed more in terms of extra conditionality in the SEIO poll, and 46 percent of respondents in June 2015 felt that the ‘policy of constant conditioning that the EU applies’ to Serbia is impeding the process, though this decreased to 35 percent by December 2015. Of those who would vote against EU accession in a hypothetical referendum, 42 percent said that accession would not bring any benefits for the country, nine percent were simply against the EU, nine percent felt that accession would be ‘blackmail and slavery’, and eight percent worried about the loss of sovereignty. As outlined above, the primary extra conditionality revolved around the arrest of three high-profile war crimes suspects up to 2011, but has since shifted to the normalization of relations with Kosovo, as outlined in Chapter 35 of the accession negotiations. These trends are in line with our findings, where the Kosovo issue appears to be of major importance as both an example of Copenhagen Plus conditionality and a condition to vest legitimacy in the process of European integration imposed by Serbian citizens.

Respondents to the December 2015 SEIO survey seem pragmatic about relations between Belgrade and Pristina, with a vast majority (65 percent) acknowledging that there are a number of issues that need to be resolved between the two sides in addition to the status of Kosovo, regardless of EU involvement in the process. On the other hand, the IRI data suggests more hardline views from the Serbian public, though nearly two thirds of the public (64 percent) had not kept abreast of developments following the Brussels Agreement. In the November 2015 survey though, 71 percent felt that recognizing Kosovan independence would be a pre-condition for Serbian accession, 57 percent of the respondents also said that Serbia should refuse to accept Kosovo’s independence, even at the expense of Serbian EU membership. Only 17 percent are willing to accept eventual Kosovo independence as an irreversible process. Worryingly, the percentage of the public willing to sacrifice EU membership for non-recognition of Kosovo’s independence has increased since the opening of accession negotiations in 2014. Individual factors, such as age, education and income, and/or cultural beliefs and identity, have consistently been found to shape either positive or negative attitudes towards Serbia’s EU membership. However, how these interact and how their effects are influenced by additional contextual domestic and even local conditions remains somewhat unclear.

More recently, an emerging body of literature has focused on the links between public opinion trends and objective domestic contextual factors – socio-economic and political – as well as the domestic political cues and media environment. Such factors appear as important ‘proxies’ used by citizens to understand complex political processes such as enlargement (Dimitrov et al. 2015; Azrout et al. 2012; de Vreese et al. 2008; Lecheler/De Vreese 2010; Maier/Rittberger 2008). These studies focus on *political cues*, *media framing* and *priming* to investigate the levels of politicization of EU issues in domestic politics. The theoretical foundations of this paper borrow largely from this branch of literature and are briefly summarized below.

### 3.2 *The media/elite discourses in Serbia*

A number of scholars of European integration have already illustrated the importance of discourses in EU policy and decision-making (Schimmelfenning 2001; Friis 1998; Karakasis 2013). Additionally, a growing body of literature has investigated the power of media discourses (Azrout et al. 2012; Durson-Ozkanca 2011), and the relationship between the domestic media and/or information environment and public

opinion towards EU policies and institutions across different countries (Azrout et al. 2012; de Vreese et al. 2008; Lecheler/De Vreese 2010; Maier/Rittberger 2008).

More recently, Hurrelmann et al. (2013) argue that politicization of European integration is best approached as a discursive phenomenon, which required “an issue [to] become salient in political communication that seeks to influence – or responds to – collective decision making” (2013: 45). Hurrelmann et al. (2013) identify three arenas of political discourse – the institutional arena, the intermediate arena, and the citizenry discursive arena. The institutional arena is ‘at the core of the political systems’ and is populated by full-time policy-makers, politicians, and legislators. The intermediate arenas are those bridging the policy-making process with the broader citizenry (Hurrelmann et al. 2013: 45). These concepts are closely related to Schmidt’s (2006) distinction between coordinative and communicative discourses. Coordinative discourses are those that specify the debate in the policy-making process in certain domains, while the communicative ones reflect the domestic debate in which policy-makers justify their decisions, positions, and actions to the general public. Herranz-Surrallés (2012) has used it in an analysis on EU enlargement discourses at previous enlargement rounds as far back as the accession of Spain and Portugal, showing the differences between these two types of discourses.

What is interesting is that Hurrelmann et al. (2013) distinguish, next to the more elite-driven discourses, *the citizenry discursive arena*. In this area, discourses exist that are supported and populated by ordinary citizens, thus providing an understanding of how citizens discuss and communicate about politics. With the exception of Hurrelmann et al. (2013) and a few earlier studies such as the prominent work of Diez Medrano (2003), discourses among citizens, at the citizenry discursive level, have been largely absent from the academic debate. In our analysis, we address the differences between citizens’ discourses on the one hand and the discourses communicated by elites and the media on the other hand. We will research whether the same dynamic appears between elites and citizens in candidate countries as in EU member states. For this purpose, we devise a way to quantify this mass-elite gap, while simultaneously making its content visible in a qualitative manner. The following section summarizes the methodological approaches we adopt to identify the discourses among citizens, the collection of media/elite statements, and the coding strategy for the latter.

### 3.3 *Serbian discourses on EU enlargement: methods and data*

#### 3.3.1 *The discourses among Serbian citizens – Q method*

In order to identify the discourses among citizens on the topic of EU enlargement, we used a reconstructive bottom-up method (i.e., Q methodology) to gather primary data from citizens themselves and then analyze it. In contrast to mass public opinion surveys, like Eurobarometer or other reconstructive approaches, Q method allows for the subjects to define and formulate the parameters of the respective domain – in our case, EU enlargement. The study of political discourses among citizens in Serbia is part of a comparative study of the discourses in six different countries in total. The same research design and strategy was applied in all six countries, while considering and adjusting each research step to the respective domestic and local



context. A detailed explanation of the methodological and theoretical foundations of the study of political discourses and the specific application of Q method of it can be found in Dimitrova/Kortenska (2015) and Dimitrova et al. (2015). Q methodology allows us to explore and identify the shared understandings among citizens in the way they experience and talk about the past and future enlargement of the EU.

Each Q study, including in Serbia, followed the same main steps. They started with a collection of a large database of statements – referred to as a ‘concourse’ in Q methodology – by means of focus groups. In Serbia, three focus group discussions – in Belgrade, Vranje, and Bosilegrad – were conducted in February and March 2014. The transcribed and translated content of the focus group was then analyzed using Dryzek’s political discourse analyses matrix to narrow down the broad dataset of statements to a subset of 64 statements – referred to as a Q set. These 64 statements were then used in 40 individual interviews throughout the country. It is important to note is that participants in the individual interviews are different from those participating in the focus groups (see Dimitrova/Kortenska 2015; Dimitrova et al. 2015).<sup>7</sup> This second stage of the fieldwork took place from September to November 2014.

During the face-to-face interviews, subjects were asked to rank order the Q set of 64 items according to the degree of their own agreement or disagreement with each of them on a scale from +6 to -6 respectively. The result of each interview is called a ‘Q sort’ and represents the intersubjective, unique viewpoint of each respondent on the topic of EU enlargement as expressed in the way fellow citizens have described it. The interviewees are selected to be as diverse as possible in terms of major socio-economic characteristics such as education, occupation, age, gender etc. The 40 Q sorts collected in Serbia were Q factor analyzed in order to model and identify the shared gestalt viewpoints that exist among Serbians on matters of enlargement. The resulting interpretations of the identified Serbian discourses are restricted to the results of the statistical analysis.<sup>8</sup> The following sections provide detailed overview of the media statements collection and the framework we devise for their analyses.

### 3.3.2. *Media/elite discourses - data collection*

The data on predominant Serbian media discourses was collected from two Belgrade-based daily newspapers - *Politika* and *Danas*. Although Serbians obtain news from online-only sources and social media with increasing frequency, the research focused on two of the most established traditional media outlets in the country for two reasons. First, the two publications capture the dominant Serbian discourses of the establishment (*Politika*) and of opposition / intellectuals (*Danas*). Second, both newspapers have a searchable archive, which facilitated data collection.

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7 The interviews were conducted again in Belgrade and Vranje and in three additional locations – Sopot, Slance, and Bačevac – to capture the regional diversity in the country and reflect on the different contexts in which discourses occur.

8 Even though here we take the case study of Serbia as illustrative, our analyses below are based on the comparative study of discourses among citizens in The Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, and FYR Macedonia conducted by Dimitrova and Kortenska (2015) and Dimitrova et al. (2015).

*Politika* published its first issue in January 1904, during the Kingdom of Serbia, and is one of the oldest continuously running newspapers in the Balkans (B92 2009). The daily is often seen as the ‘newspaper of record’ in Serbia, which publishes news from a conservative ‘official viewpoint’ (Radimirović 2015). At the beginning of the Milošević era in the 1980s, the *Politika* management was replaced by supporters of the regime so that it could act as a government mouthpiece, which it did until Milošević was ousted in 2001 (Jones 2015: 1902). Since then, the newspaper has regained editorial independence, though it is still seen as the paper of the establishment.

The heritage of *Danas* is distinctly different, and is seen as the Belgrade daily for independent intellectuals. The newspaper was established in 1997 by a group of dissident journalists who left *Naša borba* to start a daily that was independent of the regime. Because of its origins, the newspaper was often targeted by the Milošević-led authorities. In October 1998, the police raided the offices of *Danas* and the independent *Dnevni Telegraph*, ordered their closure, and placed the premises under armed guard (Smith 1998). In the following year, Vojislav Šešelj of the nationalist Serbian Radical Party brought a defamation suit against the newspapers *Danas* and *Blic* and the television channel *Studio B*. The three outlets were found guilty and fined a total of 970,000 RSD, with *Danas* fined 200,000 RSD and the paper’s editor and director being fined additional 80,000 RSD each (B92 1999; Committee for the Protection of Journalists 2000).

The data were collected from both *Politika* and *Danas* for articles published between 20 January and 20 February 2014 (inclusive), directly after Serbia had officially opened accession negotiations with the EU.<sup>9</sup> The *Politika* website has a searchable online archive that is sub-divided by day. The search term ‘evrop\*’ was used to identify potentially relevant articles in the newspaper related to EU accession. This type of search was not possible for *Danas*, so the politics, economy, and society sections were searched for the above dates. Within the relevant articles, statements on EU accession were separated by the individual speaker, each of which comprised one or more sentences. The following information was recorded for each statement: date of newspaper article; name of individual making statement; original statement (in Serbian); translated statement (in English); newspaper article title; and article URL. A total of 216 statements on EU accession were extracted from *Politika*, whilst an additional 68 statements were recorded from *Danas*. The statements were made by various actors, including Serbian politicians, members of the Serbian negotiating team, EU officials, and member state officials as well as experts. The next section outlines the coding strategy for analyzing the newspaper statements, collected in Serbia.

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9 The authors would like to thank Marija Žurnić for collecting the media statements from *Politika* and *Danas*, and for translating the statements into English.

### 3.3.3 Coding media statements

In this paper, we use the results from the Q study conducted in Serbia – the four discourses described below – to devise top-down theoretically motivated keywords that characterize and capture the broader meaning and interpretation of each discourse. Figure 1 presents the four discourses Dimitrova/Kortenska (2015) and Dimitrova et al. (2015) found in Serbia in the format of a coding scheme by which we approach the analyses of the domestic media/elite rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> The interpretation of the discourses in the first column in Figure 1 is based on the statistical analyses of the factors and distinguishing statements representing each discourse (in the second column), and guided the generating of keywords for each discourse. The numbers in the brackets after the statements in the second column represent the respective number of the statement in the Q set of 64 statements, used in the interviews. This way, each statement can be traced back to the discussion and context in which it originated. The third column in the figure lists the main keywords with which we analyzed and coded the dataset of media statements on the topic of enlargement. These keywords, taken as a set describing the content of a discourse, serve as a vignette representing a specific discourse.

These keywords used on the vignettes representing the discourses are mutually exclusive. They allow us to code statements in a binary manner (0/1), matching the broader meaning of each statement from media to a set of keywords defining one of the four discourses. If a statement fits one of the four discourses, it was coded '1' on this respective discourse and '0' on the rest. This way, we minimized overlap of concepts, arguments, and justifications in both the citizens' discourses and the statements in the media. Two researchers coded independently the set of 284 statements in total from both newspapers, with 79.2 percent agreement in the coding, which was a satisfactory level of consensus to move forward with the analyses. All statements that appear in the media but do not fit the interpretation of the discourses and the vignette template were coded '0' for all four discourses. It is these statements that allow us to both measure the size of the public-elite gap on European integration, but also to crystalize those aspects of the political debate that citizens filter out and substitute with own experiences or other contextual proxies to shape their opinion. The results of this innovative analytical approach to media content are elaborated in more detail in the following section.

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10 The labels of these discourses have been assigned by the researchers in the process of interpreting the statistical results and capture the overall meaning of the shared narrative. The latter is based on the statements, which are at the extreme ends of the distribution board and are distinguishing in terms of holding ranks significantly different than their ranks in any of the other three discourses. We also pay special attention to those statements that appear to be ranked similarly in all the discourses, called consensus statements. For further information, see Dimitrova and Kortenska (2015: 31-37).

Figure 1. Serbian discourses and their coding

Discourse A 'Cautiously Positive Expectations'		
Description	Characterizing statements	Keywords
<p>This discourse is characterized by strong and unambiguous support for the process of Serbia's integration in the EU and the future EU membership of the country. The discourse consists of strong utilitarian rationale that justifies this support, with long-term economic prosperity for the country and the future generations cautiously expected.</p> <p>At the same time, the discourse further emphasizes that the EU is a "community of rules and rights and the contrast with present day Serbia is painfully felt" (Dimitrova/Kortenska 2015: 29f).</p> <p>The discourse shows no great expectations of immediate gains and improvements after joining. Nevertheless, the accession process is praised as a learning process, but above all, as a way to a better life. The respondents are realistic about the difficulties in Serbia's path to fulfilling the EU's conditions and the necessity of domestic reforms in all spheres of political, economic, and social life.</p>	<p>The statements in agreement: <i>I want us to join the EU, since I want better life for my children. It is better for their education, it means higher employment levels, sufficient income, it means they will be able to set up their own families. (10) I think it would be better for everyone, but mostly for the young people, if we join the EU, because they will maybe have a window to the world, they can escape this poverty and leave. (50) I like the EU because it is supported by three pillars, which we don't have and are swaying back and forth. These are human rights and freedoms, free movement of people, capitals and ideas and independent justice and police. (6) The advantage of the EU is that authority and power are held by the institutions. Here they are held by individual people. (38) We are still kind of 'green' as far as EU accession goes. We want to just jump in, instead of go step by step. (5) If they let us in the EU – I will thank them, but how are we going to survive there, I don't know, because we are quite away from where they stand. (41)</i></p> <p><b>Disagreement:</b> <i>I have no idea at all what the EU may bring for us. (42) What the countries have lost upon becoming EU members is their own identity. They don't have their own identity. (18) The states have to preserve their identity and integrate only on equal terms. The positions in the EU are not equal. (16)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• benefit,</li> <li>• better future;</li> <li>• better education;</li> <li>• employment;</li> <li>• opportunities;</li> <li>• economic prospects;</li> <li>• freedoms of movement;</li> <li>• human rights;</li> <li>• trust in EU institutions;</li> <li>• European rules and standards;</li> <li>• preparation necessary;</li> <li>• domestic reforms insufficient;</li> <li>• lack of implementation;</li> <li>• lack of domestic will;</li> <li>• mistrust in domestic institutions;</li> <li>• Kosovo irrelevant;</li> <li>• Serbia's membership is a must.</li> </ul>

Discourse B 'Mistrust and Hostility'		
Description	Characterizing statements	Keywords
<p>This discourse emphasizes the costs of EU membership for Serbia and the losses for economy and security on the utilitarian side of the argument as well as losses of national sovereignty, identity, and values. It is a narrative that strongly rejects Serbia's integration in the EU. Citizens sharing this narrative emphasize the mistrust in European institutions and do not expect anything good from membership. The narrative expresses perceived weaknesses within the EU to justify the firm opposition to the whole process. The discourse contains a belief that Serbia is self-sufficient economically and accession has not led to economic development for previous applicants.</p> <p>This discourse sees EU conditionality for Serbia as unfair and imposing requirements that are against the interests of the country, both in terms of economy as well as regional security and territorial integrity. The proponents of this discourse are also characterized by the disbelief that the EU wants Serbia to join; neither do they believe that Serbia is ready for joining. On the contrary, they doubt that accession will happen any time soon (Dimitrova/Kortenska 2015: 30f).</p>	<p><b>Agreement:</b> <i>Which one of the less developed countries that has become EU member is better off at present? None. (19) It would have been nice to have our own economy. So that we don't need the EU. To be able to export our own products and not pay any duties. (49) I am against EU membership. (12) Serbia shall not accept everything offered to it by the EU. (61) The terms for EU membership that are imposed on Serbia have not been imposed on the other countries, in the political sense for instance - the separation of Kosovo. I am afraid this tension will continue to build up. (47) All this talk about the integration into EU is quite meaningless - 'empty stories' - the way it is used by the politicians to convince the people to do things that politicians otherwise can't. (48) The EU will destroy even what little Serbia has. (37) The question is whether we are competitive at all in the EU in the field of agriculture. (24) EU would sooner fall apart rather than we would become a member. (17)</i></p> <p><b>Disagreement:</b> <i>I think that we will be better off for sure when we enter the EU. (34) Simply the countries that are not as developed, for instance Serbia and the other countries in the region, are welcome in the EU due to the opening of some new markets, the investments and expansion in some new fields of influence. (25) No, the countries that have become EU member states have not lost anything. They have not lost absolutely anything. (20)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• doubt about economic development;</li> <li>• economic costs for Serbia;</li> <li>• rejection of membership;</li> <li>• opposition to EU conditions;</li> <li>• unfair, unclear and changing conditions;</li> <li>• imposing 'separation of Kosovo';</li> <li>• tensions with Pristina;</li> <li>• negative impact of integration on society;</li> <li>• loss of national sovereignty and competence;</li> <li>• EU's internal instability;</li> <li>• negative impact of previous enlargements;</li> <li>• EU's disintegration;</li> <li>• mistrust in EU institutions;</li> <li>• mistrust in Serbia's EU prospects;</li> <li>• accession negotiations more difficult;</li> <li>• threat to national security and foreign relations.</li> </ul>

Discourse C 'The Devil's in the Conditions'		
Description	Characterizing statements	Keywords
<p>The third discourse is characterized by support for Serbia's accession to the EU motivated by the opportunities this would provide for work and travel abroad, as well as better conditions for future generations. However, this support differs from the supportive position of Discourse A in that it emphasizes the preoccupation of citizens with domestic concerns from brewing brandy (rakija) to the issue of Kosovo. While the discourse contains recognition of the economic benefits, it also contains concerns about national identity and local cultures. EU requirements and regulations are seen as endangering cultural values and national identity. Furthermore, the discourse expresses criticism towards the information available about the process and the lack of clarity about the tempo and conditions for Serbia's membership.</p> <p>This discourse reflects on the Kosovo question as one of the most crucial conditions for support or rejection of accession. There is a perception of Kosovo's recognition as a loss to Serbia in terms of identity, which is seen as too high of a cost for accession. The EU does not appear as broker of stability in the Balkans. Interestingly, citizens representing this discourse do not see the EU as a global player or the only alternative for Serbia's future (Dimitrova/Kortenska 2015: 32f).</p>	<p><b>Agreement:</b> <i>The people living in the villages here will not be able to brew their own brandy once Serbia becomes a EU member. (22) The only positive thing related to the EU is that it gives work. One can go there and work. (43) I don't want Europe to give me money. Let Europe help the infrastructure. That's all I want. (64) I expect that our integration into the EU will influence [...] the economy, agriculture, healthcare, [...] and] produce significant segment of results related to the field of education. (56) We are not well-informed whether all of Serbia is going into the EU, what is the pace of progress, what it is going to receive. (36) The process of enlargement of the European Union is something that citizens personally, themselves with their actions cannot contribute to, nor can they disrupt it. (23) If we are speaking only of grants from the EU, then this EU is not attractive to me. I see the EU differently. It shall create conditions so that we can work and earn in our country, then there is our Europe. (8)</i></p> <p><b>Disagreement:</b> <i>With Kosovo or without Kosovo, we need to go for united Europe. (58) No, the countries that have become EU member states have not lost anything. They have not lost absolutely anything. (20) All states are part of Europe, the richest and most developed, as well as the poorest, and the most civilized countries. The European countries are members of the EU, except Switzerland. (13) If all 28 leading countries are EU member states, then the EU is the future of the world. (2) The Balkans would become a zone of stability once they join the EU. (62)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU's rules and restraints</li> <li>• citizens in the villages;</li> <li>• community culture;</li> <li>• support Serbia's membership;</li> <li>• opportunities to work abroad;</li> <li>• effects on community;</li> <li>• expectations for better socio-economic conditions;</li> <li>• expectations for domestic reforms;</li> <li>• financial support for infrastructure;</li> <li>• effects on agriculture;</li> <li>• Serbia's competitiveness in agriculture;</li> <li>• effects on economy and health-care;</li> <li>• improvement in education;</li> <li>• lack of information about accession;</li> <li>• lack of knowledge of benefits and costs;</li> <li>• rejection of Kosovo's recognition;</li> <li>• loss of national identity and sovereignty;</li> <li>• instability in the region.</li> </ul>

Discourse D 'Moving towards EU Rules and Institutions'		
Description	Characterizing statements	Keywords
<p>This discourse sees the EU as a source of better governance and non clientalistic rules and procedures. It recognizes the EU's ability to lock in domestic reforms in national political and economic institutions (Dimitrova/Kortenska 2015: 33f). Some economic benefits are expected with accession, but they remain. This discourse is characterized by selective support for EU's demands and underlines that domestic elites should not agree to all of them and should prioritize Serbia's national interest. The narrative portrays citizens as incapable of influencing the process of European integration and do not see any role they may have in the future. There is an understanding that enlargement is rather a function of broader globalization dynamics and as such is 'inevitable' and even necessary.</p> <p>What sets this narrative apart is that it voices out a concern of existing inequality among the current EU member states. This results in a sense of inequality between member states and candidates in the accession negotiations. In combination with that, the discourse views Serbia's progress and preparation more optimistically, by rejecting the idea that the country does not meet the requirements for accession and claiming that rapid accession represents realistic expectations (Dimitrova/Kortenska 2015: 33f).</p>	<p><b>Agreement:</b> <i>The advantage of the EU is that authority and power are held by the institutions. Here they are held by individual people. (38) The process of enlargement of the European Union is something that citizens personally, themselves with their actions cannot contribute to, nor can they disrupt it. (23) I think it is certainly in the interest of the European Union to expand, especially in the regions of Europe, where this system of rules and regulations that the EU is, is not yet developed. I think the EU enlargement is needed. (9) Some states in the EU have more rights than others. (30) The states have to preserve their identity and integrate only on equal terms. The positions in the EU are not equal. (16) I see Europe and the EU integration as an inevitable process of globalization of the new world order. (15) I think that the EU has to enlarge. (52) I am all for joining the EU as early as tomorrow and have some order and discipline observed. (55)</i></p> <p><b>Disagreement:</b> <i>We are still kind of 'green' as far as EU accession goes. We want to just jump in, instead of go step by step. (5) I do not believe that Serbia will join the EU in this way. Regardless whether with or without Kosovo, there is no state of law, there is no education, there is not a single moral value any more. (40) Once you join them in the EU, this means you accept their values, their value system, their institutions and you adapt to them. This is why they will want to invest in our country tomorrow. While they will never invest right now. (14)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trust in EU's institutions and governing;</li> <li>• support EU conditions for domestic reforms;</li> <li>• no role of the citizens;</li> <li>• no influence of citizens;</li> <li>• EU's benefit;</li> <li>• priority of Serbia's national interests;</li> <li>• should not agree to all EU demands;</li> <li>• support for EU rules and regulations;</li> <li>• inequality among member states;</li> <li>• unequal rights among MS;</li> <li>• preserve national identity;</li> <li>• equal terms of accession;</li> <li>• inevitable integration;</li> <li>• globalization;</li> <li>• enlargement is necessary;</li> <li>• rapid accession;</li> <li>• Serbia's closer to accession;</li> <li>• loss of national competences;</li> <li>• EU's internal affairs.</li> </ul>

#### 4. Elites' versus citizens' discourses: a gap in understandings

After coding all of the statements, we ran a simple frequency analysis in order to see how the total number of statements from media/elites is spread across the four factors and to what extent these four discourses are represented in the broader discursive space moving from the citizenry discursive level to the communicative, or intermediary one (Hurrelmann et al. 2013). The simplicity of the analytical approach crystalizes the common and diverging patterns in the empirical data collected among citizens and elites, and the characteristics of these patterns.

Before presenting our results, it is important to note a few broad observations. First, the media statements represent the framings and narratives of the political elite *per se*, and not a reflection of citizens' understandings of EU accession. Second, and interestingly, the data was collected over the same timespan for the two newspapers, but statements by the two main governing parties (SNS and SPS) and negotiating team are far more predominant in *Politika* than in *Danas*. Another overall observation appearing from the content of the two newspapers is that *Politika* has dedicated much more space and time to the issue of EU enlargement and Serbia's progress in signing accession negotiations – given that for the same one-month timespan, the number of news articles in *Politika* is much higher than in *Danas*. In the total set of 284 statements, about two thirds are found in the primary 'establishment' newspaper *Politika*. In the two newspapers, we find 22 duplicate statements, or such that appear in both newspapers in the same quotation of a specific leaders' speech. We believe that this is a result of the functioning of media organizations in general in the region. These duplicates do not affect the analyses of the data and are taken into account in the interpretation of results. In our interpretation, we consider the general conditions which domestic media in Serbia currently experience.

Among the four discourses, we identified a clear pro-European integration discourse (Discourse A 'Cautiously Positive Expectation') based on a complex mix of arguments, judgements, dispositions, beliefs, and emotions; and a similarly unambiguous anti-EU membership narrative (Discourse B 'Mistrust and Hostility'). An important nuance occurs in the other two narratives that are the basis of Discourse C ('The Devil's in the Conditions') and Discourse D ('Moving towards EU Rules and Institutions') (see Table 2 below; and for an overview of the discourses found in all six countries see Dimitrova/Kortenska/Steunenberg 2015: 11). These narratives emphasize different sets of arguments and/or emotional responses and experiences that reveal citizens' willingness to vest legitimacy in Serbia's accession to the EU or, on the contrary, their opposition and rejection of the process. We used these nuances as a tool to investigate the mismatch between the understandings of domestic and EU political actors that are engaged directly in the accession process and the understandings among citizens. Citizens' perceptions and attitudes cannot have a direct impact on the process of enlargement according to the current institutional design of EU enlargement, but they could influence and even derail enlargement indirectly, as we have argued in Dimitrova et al. (2015).

Table 2 presents the results of simple frequency analyses of the coded media statements. It contains both the results including the repeating statements and the results when they are excluded. The analysis shows that all four discourses are represented in the media in a total of 228 statements. Based on this



set of statements, 20 statements fit in more than one discourse, namely ten statements fit Discourses A and C, ten statements fit Discourses A and D, and a single statement fits Discourses C and D. This seems logical given some similarities between these three largely supportive narratives. We counted them in both discourses in which they appear, which makes the total percentage higher than 100 percent. Note that these are not necessarily the statements that are duplicated in both newspapers.

Excluding the duplicate statements, the match between media and citizens' discourses is 75.6 percent. This leaves 66 statements, or 24.4 percent, out of the scope of citizens' understandings on the topic of enlargement. This percentage represents, in our view, the existing gap between the public and the elites, which other studies have previously theorized (Hooghe/Marks 2005, 2008; Herranz-Surrallés 2012). The statements which constitute this percentage define the substance of the divergence between citizens' and domestic political elites' positions on Serbia's accession. Before focusing on the content of these statements, we first outline how the media content actually matches each of the separate discursive rationales among citizens.

*Table 2. Frequency of media statements classified by citizen discourse (percentages in parentheses)*

	All media statements (N=284)	Non-duplicate statements (N=262)
Discourse A - Cautiously Positive Expectations	133 (46.8%)	115 (43.9%)
Discourse B - Mistrust and Hostility	17 (6.0%)	17 (6.5%)
Discourse C - The Devil's in the Conditions	46 (16.2%)	45 (17.2%)
Discourse D - Moving towards EU Rules and Institutions	43 (15.1%)	38 (14.5%)
Statements not fitting any citizen discourse	66 (23.2%)	64 (24.4%)

Source: Authors.

#### **4.1 Citizens and elites in resonance: (mis-)matching support**

In contrast to the rather pessimistic public opinion survey trends, reviewed earlier, the discursive approach to the study of citizens' perceptions and attitudes appears much more optimistic. We find that the highest share of media statements aligns with Discourse A 'Cautiously Positive Expectations', which expresses high level of support, driven by predominantly rational and utilitarian justifications, yet sees Serbia as still having a long road before it can become an official member of the EU. In contrast, Discourse B is least represented in the print media, with only six percent of the media statements matching the vignette for it. This finding appears counterintuitive given the negative trends in public opinion data described earlier

and has significantly different policy implications for the future enlargement rounds and the accession of Serbia in particular than surveys suggest.

What is interesting about Discourse B is that all 17 statements in the newspapers that fit its frame originate in quotes by members of the oppositional Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), of which 14 statements are made by the party leader Vojislav Koštunica. His claims about the economic costs and loss for Serbia due to the EU integration are fully in line with the rationale we find in the 'Mistrust and Hostility' discourse among citizens. It remains unclear from the analyses here, and we can only speculate, if it is citizens' discourses that have been 'cued' by political leaders in terms of these negative evaluations. The opposite could be true as well: leaders such as Koštunica and fellow party members may have sensed the increasing dissatisfaction and opposition among the electorate, and may have adopted such negative rhetoric in an effort for vote-maximization in domestic elections. The year 2014 was also the year of early national government elections, which on a few occasions appear in the media coverage. Nevertheless, our analyses show that the arguments and the logic of rejection in the public rhetoric resonate strongly with those occurring in the anti-integrationist elite discourse.

Discourses C and D, which are both supportive of EU enlargement in line with the first one, are equally well represented in the media, and appear more frequently than Koštunica's anti-EU rhetoric, with a respective 16.2 percent and 15.1 percent share of the total number of statements. Discourse C has a marginal lead, but 10 statements in both the Discourses C and D are coded to fit the logic of Discourse A as well. Note that these are not the duplicate statements, which refer to the different numbers of the two analyses presented in Table 2. The number of statements for Discourses C and D in Table 2 in both columns includes those statements that fitted them, while simultaneously fitting into the Discourse A vignette. This does not change the picture greatly, but re-emphasizes the systematic similarities which occur across discourses that are all positive towards accession. Nonetheless, they carry nuanced, distinctly different meanings and rationales. The match, we reveal, between Discourse C 'The Devil's in the Conditions' and the media statements confirms the importance of country-specific criteria and enlargement context in shaping citizens' attitudes on the one hand, and updating enlargement policy on the other.

The 'new' enlargement approach emphasizes regional cooperation and bilateral relations in the Western Balkans and the EU-led Belgrade-Pristina dialogue as a major factor for Serbia's progress in the integration process. It has been also the reason for difficulties in EU-Serbia relations, as discussed in detail in Section 2 above. The political debate about recognition of Kosovo's independence as opposed to normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina being an EU condition remains unclear to citizens that ascribe to Discourse C. They do not make a distinction in terms of Chapter 35 versus other chapters, and they are afraid that EU conditions will 'force' the Serbian government to recognize the independence of Kosovo. This leads to rejection of Serbia's membership, even though they recognize the positive effects this will have on the economic, political, and social context in Serbia. Indeed, looking into the statements that refer to the Kosovo issue as a most important one in the media reveals a level of ambiguity and uncertainty among domestic elites. While some clearly state that Chapter 35 conditions and the Brussels agreement expect normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, they do not mention recognition of Kosovo's status.

Statements from government officials point out that Serbia will not change its position regarding Kosovo's independence. Evidently, the ambiguity on the Kosovo question in the media is mirrored among citizens.

It is surprising that all four discourses are represented in the media. Although it does not tell us about the dynamics between media coverage and discourses, it does allow us to better understand the boundaries of citizens' discourses, their content, but also the issues that remain somehow excluded in the understandings of citizens and in the way they shape their political preferences.

## 4.2 Citizens and elites in dissonance: mass-elite gap

An interesting group of statements are those where media and citizens' discourses do not match (see Table 2). These 66 media statements (23 percent) are omitted in citizens' discourses. The content of the gap indicates some interesting features of the EU enlargement process and the perception of citizens about it.

First, the narratives among citizens do not refer to the start of accession negotiations as a *historical achievement* for Serbia. This was voiced predominantly by Prime Minister Ivica Dačić in January 2014, when the negotiations officially began. Of the statements that did not fit in with the dominant citizen discourses on EU accession, 17 (25.8 percent) alluded to the historic achievement of opening membership negotiations.

Second, citizens do not discuss the effects of an early general election on the process of Serbia's accession negotiations. Seven of the statements (10.6 percent) referred to the upcoming national elections. Based on the timing of the media data, this is not surprising. Domestic political parties attempted to posture before the poll, while others assessed whether the elections would be disruptive to accession and Pristina-Belgrade negotiations.

Third, media statements do not coincide with citizen discourses on technical aspects of the process. Details referring to the intricacies of the process are largely omitted in the understandings of citizens, including who will lead the Serbian negotiation team, how domestic leaders cooperate, and the sequence of chapter negotiations and institutional steps required also remain outside of the scope of citizen discourses. A total of 13 media statements (19.7 percent) refer to the comments made, unsurprisingly, by Tanja Mišćević, the Chief Negotiator for the Serbian government.

Fourth, although not as prevalent within the citizen-media gap, four statements (6.1 percent) referred to exact dates of expected accession and the Western Balkans' importance of accession, respectively. Another three statements (4.5 percent) discussed whether there should be a referendum on EU accession in Serbia. These have been completely ignored by citizens, who do not discuss a possible referendum, or at least such is not central to their viewpoints. Citizens also do not at all refer to a particular timeframe for accession.

What is interesting is that regional reconciliation and security, which is at the heart of the EU SAp, only appears at the margins of media discourses and is negligible amongst citizen discourses regarding Serbian membership in the EU. The remaining 18 statements (27.3 percent) cover a range of topics, including bilateral cooperation with Slovakia, attitudes amongst member states about Serbian accession, and the launch of a commemorative postage stamp to mark the start of accession negotiations. Some of the main topics that fall within the discursive gap between media and citizens are summarized in Table 3.

*Table 3. Prevalent topics for media statements not matching citizen discourses*

Topic	Speaker	Example
Historic achievement	Ivica Dačić (PM)	Ahead of tomorrow's first intergovernmental conference with the EU in Brussels, Serbian Prime Minister Ivica Dačić says that he is proud to be one of the few Serbian prime ministers who achieved historical results which future generations will remember.
	Aleksandar Vučić (deputy PM)	Vučić says that today is an important and big day for Serbia.
Technicalities	Tanja Mišćević (Chief Negotiator)	Asked for a negotiating framework, she said that the document will contain the principles of negotiation and that this document, as well as the introductory statement at the intergovernmental conference will be published on the website of the government of Serbia, noting that both documents must be made public.
	Anonymous (Serbian negotiator)	Politika's source in the Serbian negotiation team said that Belgrade insists on opening three chapters in June, the above mentioned Chapter 32, then the Chapter 35 relating to Kosovo, as well as one of the so-called easy chapters which do not contain too many EU legal norms, such as Chapter 25 (science and research) or 26 (education and culture).
National Election	Tanja Mišćević (Chief Negotiator)	Asked whether the elections would slow the integration process, she said: "Not necessarily, if they were organized faster with a short electoral campaign."
	Ivica Dačić (PM)	We'll make sure that Serbia doesn't lag behind in the EU integration process, despite the ongoing electoral campaign. It means that the elections should not affect the process of integration, or the implementation of reforms and, certainly not, the dialogue with Pristina, Dačić said.

Source: Authors.

While media pays attention to the details related to opening negotiation chapters – both chapters that are the easiest and the most difficult – citizens seem to ignore these aspects of the process, and instead

rely on personal experiences in local and national socio-economic and political affairs. They are realistic about everyday life in their country and how it is affected by European integration in more practical terms.

At the same time, in the first discourse among citizens, we find a high level of criticism towards national political and economic elites and a high level of dissatisfaction with the socio-economic conditions in the country and even more so the political will for reform. While the biggest proportion of statements in the media aligns with this same discourse, none of them criticizes the domestic governments and institutions in substance as citizens do. They rather refer to the lengthy process of accession negotiations and the difficult reforms that would be needed for a successful outcome.

## 5. Conclusions and discussion

Starting with the historical development of EU-Serbia relations, this paper investigates the link between the political elites and citizens' attitudes on matters of European integration and enlargement in particular. The study of Serbia, as an illustrative case for the Western Balkans candidates, has provided the opportunity to investigate these relationships in a country, which is outside of the EU, but on the road to transformation in order to join the European 'club'.

The results of our analyses are quite surprising, given the earlier description of public opinion trends in Serbia and the declining enthusiasm among the Serbian public towards integration. First, the findings of the earlier citizens' discourse analysis conducted in Serbia revealed a much more positive outlook by citizens towards enlargement. Citizens remain optimistic, although the discourses are characterized by cautious expectations of improvements for the country and individuals in terms of standards of living, democratic rules and norms, and economic prosperity. Serbian citizens express a significant level of mistrust towards national political institutions at the expense of expectations of better governance stemming from EU institutions, rules, and norms in most of the discourses except in the 'Mistrust and Hostility' narrative. Second, in major national newspapers, we found that the debate is clearly pro-European and shows a significant bias towards positive claims about EU enlargement, its effects on Serbia's economy and citizens, and the role of the EU for the future of Serbia. Third, just like citizens, the media pays special attention to the Kosovo question, pointing to different ideas about the future effects these issues may have on Serbia's accession negotiations.

The results of our empirical analyses suggest that although two thirds of the media and citizens' arguments, claims, and ideas match, a significant portion of the statements does not. This group of statements defines the size and content of the mass-elite gap in Serbia. That is, almost one quarter of the elements found in the Serbian elite rhetoric remains outside the understandings of citizens. This in particular reflects the divisions discussed in this paper, namely the institutional design and intricacies of the enlargement policy known by those who are engaged in it at the supranational level versus citizens. What counts for citizens are the tangible effects and consequences of European integration as they experience them on the local, community, and individual levels. Free movement for the purposes of work and education appears among the most significant and easily visible benefits, which result in support for Serbian accession. However, this

is paired with a sense of despair and misery caused by the domestic context, which, judging by citizens' discourses, is not perceived to have improved during the integration process thus far. Long-term benefits are also underlined as opposed to short-term gains, and they are particularly emphasized to be an asset for the country and/or community rather than the individual citizen. However, expectations of benefits are much more cautious among citizens than among elites.

The other major discrepancy between the media and the citizens is the lack of historically motivated rhetoric among citizens, which, in contrast, is present in the media. This also significantly distinguishes the enlargement process of ex-Yugoslav countries as opposed to the enlargement of CEE candidates. Accession of CEE countries was imbued with a strong pro-EU bridging discourse that resonated among citizens in both candidates' and member states' publics and elites at the time and resorted to the common European identity and the notion of the 'Reunification of Europe' (Dimitrova/Kortenska 2016). Such discourse is absent in the public debate in Serbia, as our discourse analyses among citizens shows, even though we find some similar aspects of such rhetoric in the media. This suggests that the media might not be as effective in priming and framing the understandings of citizens, unless other conditions are at play. Another major aspect of the citizenry and intermediate discourses in Serbia is the only minimal reference to the EU as a broker of regional security, cooperation, and peace. Serbian citizens do not seem to believe that the EU is a major global actor and that enlargement in the Balkans will ensure peace and security in and around the region. Citizens seem to downplay this aspect of enlargement, even though it is one of the underlying rationales of EU enlargement as a foreign policy.

The analysis suggests that a gap exists between elite and media discourses and discourses in which citizens participate. As indicated, not all judgments, arguments, and claims made in media and elite discourses are reflected in citizens' discourses, while not all citizens' discourses, and especially the more skeptical 'Mistrust and Hostility' discourse, are covered by the media. In this respect, a rather imperfect link between these discourses exists. This raises further questions about how elites may affect citizens' discourses, as well as the extent to which some of these citizens' discourses will be represented in the near future by new political 'entrepreneurs'. When some discourses are not yet part of the elite discourses, there is a possibility that someone will use these ideas and sentiments in order to gain electoral support. In the case of the 'Mistrust and Hostility' discourse, this may increase Euroskepticism in Serbia, which may have a negative impact on the ongoing accession process.

The analysis in this paper has focused predominantly on elite discourses as they appear in the Serbian print media in 2014. We have taken Serbia as a case to illustrate the existing public-elite gap and the concurrence between the citizens' and the elites' positions according to the domestic newspaper data. Knowing the state-of-affairs of media independence in the Western Balkans region and Serbia, we are aware of the political influence exercised over major traditional media outlets. Citizens may be distrustful of domestic media sources and thus refer more regularly to alternative ones. Thus, while we can claim with a high level of confidence that we can capture the gap between elite and citizen understandings in Serbia, analyses of media content that originates from alternative media sources such as social media or online news platforms content may yield different or more nuanced results.

Further research may show whether this imperfect link between elite discourses and discourses among citizens exists in other countries. The methodological approach and analytical framework allows for a replication of the study in other candidate countries, but also EU member states, where a Q study on the citizens' discourses has already been conducted and a media content database for the respective timespan is available. Alternatively, a future research agenda may focus on extending the bottom-up Q method approach to exploring discourses in more countries and replicating the analytical approach to media content on which the analysis in the paper has relied in other topics. This could further untangle the complex relationships between different kinds and levels of factors in shaping the political views of European citizens and strengthen our understanding of legitimacy behind the widening and deepening of European integration.

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**“Maximizing the integration capacity of the European Union: Lessons of and prospects for enlargement and beyond”**

The ‘big bang enlargement’ of the European Union (EU) has nurtured vivid debates among both academics and practitioners about the consequences of ‘an ever larger Union’ for the EU’s integration capacity. The research project MAXCAP will start with a critical analysis of the effects of the 2004-2007 enlargement on stability, democracy and prosperity of candidate countries, on the one hand, and the EU’s institutions, on the other. We will then investigate how the EU can maximize its integration capacity for current and future enlargements. Featuring a nine-partner consortium of academic, policy, dissemination and management excellence, MAXCAP will create new and strengthen existing links within and between the academic and the policy world on matters relating to the current and future enlargement of the EU.